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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001179

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [KWMN](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: WOMEN MINISTERS SET POSITIVE PRECEDENT

REF: A. STATE 137596

[1](#)B. MANAMA 982

[1](#)C. MANAMA 943

[1](#)D. MANAMA 165

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Bahrain's two women ministers are setting a positive example for women's leadership in Bahrain. Minister of Health Dr. Nada Abbas Haffadh, who was appointed in April 2004, and Dr. Fatima Al Balooshi, appointed in January 2005, are the first women to serve in Bahrain's cabinet. End Summary.

Minister of Health Dr. Nada Abbas Haffadh

[1](#)2. (C) Dr. Nada Abbas Haffadh, the first female member of Bahrain's cabinet, was appointed Minister of Health on April 21, 2004. Before serving as minister, she was a member of the appointed upper house of parliament, the Shura Council. During her time in the Shura, she was one of the more outspoken and impressive members and was viewed by many as a natural choice for Minister of Health. A medical doctor, Haffadh served in the Ministry of Health for a number of years prior to her appointment as minister and was highly regarded for her contributions to public health. People who know Haffadh say she is loyal to the government, but committed to reform. As Minister, she has made significant personnel changes within the ministry without regard to sect. In parliamentary hearings, she is more frank than most cabinet members and acknowledges deficiencies in the GOB and in her ministry and the need for reform. Some of the issues she has addressed before parliament include the effects of corporate pollution on public health, emergency health services, and hygiene in beauty salons.

[1](#)3. (C) Haffadh was born on September 27, 1957 in Manama, Bahrain. She completed her M.D. and several related degrees at universities in Europe and the Middle East, including the American University of Beirut. Haffadh is married with three children and does not wear the hijab. The Haffadhs are Ajam Shi'as. (Note: The Ajam Shi'a are of Persian origin and originally came to Bahrain as merchants. They represent approximately ten percent of the total population of Bahrain and are generally more pro-government than Shi'a of Bahraini origin. End Note.) The GOB includes some Shi'a in the Cabinet. Non-strategic posts, such as the Ministry of Health, are often informally reserved for Shi'as, leaving Sunnis to head the strategic ministries.

[1](#)4. (C) Haffadh has traveled to the U.S. on numerous occasions and speaks fluent Arabic and English. According to her resume, in 2004 she attended a conference in Qatar entitled Relations of the Islamic World with the U.S. In 2003, she participated in a MEPI-sponsored National Democratic Institute (NDI) conference on legislative drafting. Also in 2003, Haffadh traveled to the U.S. in her capacity as a Shura Council member and met with members of Congress. She has met informally with the Ambassador and DCM.

Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Fatima Al Balooshi

[1](#)5. (C) Dr. Fatima Mohammed Yousif Al Balooshi was appointed Minister of Social Affairs on January 14, 2005. In the eight years prior to her appointment as minister, she was the dean of Bahrain University's College of Education. In a meeting with the Ambassador shortly after she was appointed, Al Balooshi said that she was pleased, but also very surprised, that the King asked her to serve as Minister. She said she was quite happy at the university and had not expected to leave academia. Al Balooshi told the Ambassador she was eager to implement programs that would help Bahrainis, and she has already led a number of initiatives to assist persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged people. Al Balooshi told the Ambassador in June that she is not as comfortable dealing with political issues as she is with the core work of her Ministry (Ref B). Social Affairs is the body that officially registers and regulates the activities

of civil society organizations and, as such, Al Balooshi is ultimately responsible for decisions to punish or sanction these groups. In early July she ordered the Islamic Action Society closed for 45 days (Ref C) and has dealt with requests from members of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (which was closed and dissolved by her predecessor in September 2004) to reopen. When it comes to political issues, contacts complain Al Balooshi is a "yes woman" for the GOB.

16. (C) Al Balooshi was born in Bahrain on November 19, 1963. She is from a large Sunni family and is married with several children. Her brother, Dr. Nasser Al Balooshi, was recently appointed Bahraini ambassador to the U.S. She speaks fluent Arabic and English and wears the hijab. Al Balooshi was an Eisenhower Fellow and received a Masters degree and Ph.D. in Instructional and Media Technology from Columbia University in New York. She completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Concordia in Canada. Al Balooshi, who has met with the Ambassador on several occasions, has told the Ambassador that she often reflects on her experiences in the U.S. when designing social service programs for Bahrain (Ref D).

Comment

17. (C) Bahrain's two women ministers are proving that women can contribute to the development of the country. When discussing the participation of women in the 2006 elections, people from the government and opposition alike often cite Haffadh and Al Balooshi as examples of women who are highly capable in leadership roles.

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